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ABSTRACT

While English modal verbs have been studied extensively, Chinese modal verbs have only been analyzed in a general way. A discussion of the six properties of Chinese modal verbs by Li and Thompson (1981, 1997) examined this area, though some of the properties that they proposed appear to be inaccurate or flawed. This paper concentrates on one of the six properties, which states that Chinese modal verbs cannot be modified by intensifiers such as "hen" (very) or "geng" (even more). It uses data from various written sources in China, including dictionaries, textbooks, reference books, and newspapers. By examining these examples, which contain three types of intensifiers identified by Quirk et al. (1973), this paper argues that most of the Chinese modal verbs can be modified by intensifiers (especially emphasizers and amplifiers), contrary to the claim by Li and Thompson. While some of the modal verbs can be modified by only certain types of intensifiers, a number of Chinese modal verbs can be modified by each of the three types of intensifiers. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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Intensifying Modifiers for Chinese Modal Verbs[1]

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ED 465 294

Abstract While English modal verbs have been studied rather extensively (e.g., Palmer 1977, 1986, 1990; Quirk et al. 1973, 1985), Chinese modal verbs have been analyzed only in a general way (e.g., Chao 1968; Teng 1975). The discussion on the six properties of Chinese modal verbs by Li and Thompson in their *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional and Reference Grammar* (1981, 1997) certainly explores this area more thoroughly than previous studies. Nevertheless, some of the properties they have proposed seem to be inaccurate, if not flawed. This paper concentrates on one of the six properties which states that Chinese modal verbs "cannot be modified by intensifiers, such as ***hěn*** 'very' or ***gèng*** 'even more'" (Li and Thompson 1997:173). By examining numerous examples from various written sources which contain the three types of intensifiers identified by Quirk et al. (1973), this paper argues with compelling evidence that most of the Chinese modal verbs can certainly be modified by intensifiers, contrary to Li and Thompson's claim (ibid).

1. Introduction. Unlike the analysis of English modal verbs, which has been rather thorough and in depth (e.g., Palmer 1977, 1986, 1990; Quirk et al. 1973, 1985), the analysis of Chinese modal verbs has been rather general and simplistic (e.g., Chao 1968; Teng 1975). Li and Thompson's discussion of Chinese modal verbs[2] in their *Mandarin Chinese: A Functional and Reference Grammar* (1981, 1997) certainly explores this area more thoroughly than previous studies. Particularly, they have identified six properties that can be readily used to distinguish Chinese modal verbs from other verbs. Some of those properties, however, seem

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to be inaccurate if not flawed.

Having identified the following sixteen modal verbs and divided them into seven types (1997:182-183), Li and Thompson suggest that Chinese modal verbs "cannot be modified by intensifiers, such as ***hěn*** 'very' or ***gèng*** 'even more'" as one of the six properties they have proposed (ibid:173-174). They have, however, provided only one example, as in (1), to demonstrate this property (ibid:173). The modal verb in this example is ***néng*** and the two intensifiers are ***hěn*** and ***gèng***. Although (1) may argue for the property they proposed that Chinese modal verbs "cannot be modified by intensifiers, such as ***hěn*** 'very' or ***gèng*** 'even more'"(ibid:173), (2) certainly provides a counter-example to their claim. Here ***hěn***, an intensifier, clearly modifies the modal verb ***néng***, not the main verb ***tuánjié***, because if ***néng*** is deleted, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as in (3).

yīnggāi, yīngdāng, gāi	'ought to, should'
néng, nénggòu, huì, kěyi	'be able to'
néng, kěyi	'has permission to'
gǎn	'dare'
kěn	'be willing to'
děi, bìxū, bìyào, bìděi	'must, ought to'
huì	'will, know how'

(1) ta * **hěn** / **gèng** néng chàng - ge (ibid:173).
3sg very / even:more can sing - song

(2) ... **hěn** néng tuánjié rén (Meng et al. 1987:510).
very can unite people

'... can unite people very well.'

(3) *tā **hěn** tuánjié rén.
3sg very unite people

Furthermore, intensifiers do not constitute a homogenous group. Instead, they demonstrate different semantic properties. According to Quirk et al. (1973:439), intensifiers can be divided into the following three semantic types: emphasizers, amplifiers, and downtoners. Two of them, amplifiers and downtoners, also have several subcategories. The two intensifiers, ***hěn*** 'very' and ***gèng*** 'even more' in Li and Thompson's (ibid:173) only example, however, are both boosters, a subcategory of amplifiers, which unavoidably provide a non-convincing and incomplete generalization that Chinese modal verbs cannot be modified by intensifiers.

2. Purpose and Design of the Study. Since there are different types of intensifiers with different subcategories and since Li and Thompson's property (ibid:173) is based on only one example from only one of the subcategories of the amplifying intensifiers, it certainly calls for further investigation into whether or not other subcategories of amplifying intensifiers and, especially, other different types of intensifiers can modify Chinese modal verbs so that Li and Thompson's property (ibid:173) can be verified more convincingly and thoroughly. This paper is designed to answer such a question. The data for this study were all collected from various official written sources from China, such as dictionaries, textbooks, reference books, and newspapers from official Chinese news agencies. Sentences from these sources containing each of the different types of intensifiers are closely examined, and both affirmative and negative sentences are also included.[3] In order to make the results of this study comparable to Li and Thompson's example

(ibid:173), only the modal verbs identified by Li and Thompson (ibid:182-183) are discussed in this paper, although their identification of Chinese modal verbs has been questioned (Huang 1995).

3. Discussion. In the following, twenty-nine sentences with each type of intensifiers, including their subcategories discussed by Quirk et al. (1973:439), are examined. In order to facilitate the discussion, intensifiers are italicized and modal verbs are bold-faced in the examples. The modal verbs in these sentences are only those identified by Li and Thompson (ibid:182-183). The intensifiers in these sentences can be identified easily not only because of their semantic meanings that are to reinforce the value of modal verbs, but also because of their specific sentential position in modification of modal verbs; that is, they always occur immediately before modal verbs they modify. This preceding modal verb position of intensifiers proves to be a unique recognizable property of intensifiers when modifying modal verbs in Chinese, because if the modal verb in this environment is deleted, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as shown in affirmative sentences in (3) and (4) and the negative sentence in (5):

(4)a. tā *hěn* **gǎn** shuōhuà (Meng et al. 1984:288).
3sg very dare speak

'He really dares to speak out his opinions.'

b. * tā *hěn* shuōhuà
3sg very speak

(5)a. dāyìng bíerén de shì, *wànwàn* bù **néng** shīxìn (Wang 1984:168).
promise others NOM thing absolutely not can break promise

'Once you have promised, you should never break your word.'

b. *dāyìng bíerén de shì, *wànwàn* shīxìn
promise others NOM thing absolutely break promise

In this section, intensifiers that are used as amplifiers, emphasizers, and downtoners, including their subcategories, to modify Chinese modal verbs are illustrated and discussed.

3.1 Amplifiers. According to Quirk et al. (1973), amplifying intensifiers can be further divided into two categories: boosters and maximizers. The former is used to "denote a high degree, a high point on the scale," while the latter is used to "denote the upper extreme of the scale" (Quirk et al. 444). Because Li and Thompson (ibid) examined only two boosters in their example, I will first examine further, with more examples, whether or not boosters can modify modal verbs in Chinese. In (5), ***gèng***, a booster which, according to Li and Thompson (ibid), cannot modify modal verbs, is used to modify six different modal verbs.

(5)a. wǒ yuán yǐwéi yīnyǔ tiān *gèng* **néng** chèntuō chū tā de shénmì,
I former thought rainy day even:more can set off out 3sg GEN[4] mystery

zài qīngliáng shìjiè de jìnrùn zhōng, yóurén *gèng* **néng** pǐnwèi tā
at cool world ASSOC[5] soak in tourists even:more can taste 3sg

de jīngsúi (Jiang 1999).
GEN quintessence

'I thought a rainy day might set off its mystery even better, and tourists could taste its theme much better, when immersed in this cool world.'

b. pútaoyòu bùdàn yǒu nóngyùde xiāngwèi, *gèng* **kěyi** jìnghuà fánzá
grape fruit not only have strong smell even:more may purify tumultuous

sīxù...(Shenzhen Wanbao 2001).
thought

'Grapefruit not only has a rich sweet smell; it may even get rid of tumultuous thoughts.'

c. xiàng wǒ zhè yàng de rén, *gèng* **yīng** kànshū xuéxí (Chen 1997).
like me this kind NOM[6] people even:more should read study

'People like me should read and study even more.'

d. ài shū de rén jiǎng shōucáng, *gèng* **yào** jiǎng liútōng (Xie 1999).
love book NOM people value collect even:more should value circulate

'Those who love books care about collecting them; they should care about book circulation even more.'

e. wō zuòwéi yì míng zhōngguórén, *gèng* **yīngdāng** xué hǎo, zhǎngwò hǎo
I as one CL[7] Chinese person even:more should study well master well

zhōngwén (Kan 1999).
Chinese

'As a Chinese person, it is more appropriate for me to study Chinese well and master it.'

f. nà shì yī wèi lái zì dà xīběi de gūniang, èr shí qī suì,
that is one CL come from big northwest NOM girl two ten seven year

yīnwèi xīnzàng bìng, jì bù **gǎn** liànài, *gèng* bù **gǎn** jiéhūn (Yang 1992).
because heart disease either not dare love even:more not dare marriage

'That is a twenty-seven year old girl from the Northwest. Because of her heart disease, she doesn't dare to fall in love with anyone, let alone marry anyone.'

Another booster, ***hěn*** 'very,' according to Li and Thompson (ibid), cannot modify Chinese modal verbs as shown in their example. The modal verbs in (6), however, are all modified by this intensifier.

(6)a. tā *hěn* **huì** gàn jiāwù huó (Meng et al. 1984:289).
3sg very know how do household chore

'He knows very well how to do household chores.'

b. xīn láide zhèngwěi tóng lǎo zhèngwěi yīyàng, *hěn* **huì** tītiē
new come commissar and old commissar same very know how care for

zhànshì (Huang & Liao 1988:356).
soldire

'Like the old commissar, the newly arrived commissar can take care of the soldiers very well.'

c. tā *hěn* **gǎn** shuōhuà (Meng et al. 1984:288).
3sg very dare speak

'He really dares to speak out his opinions.'

d. ... *hěn* **néng** bàn shì (Xiàndài Hànyu Cídiǎn 1996:516).
very can do thing

'... can handle things very well.'

e. ... *hěn* **néng** tuánjié rén (Meng et al. 1987:510).
very can unite people

'... can unite people very well.'

Another subcategory of amplifiers consists of maximizers which include ***juéduì*** 'absolutely,' ***wánquán*** 'completely,' ***quánbù*** 'entirely,' ***chèdǐ*** 'thoroughly' and ***zuì*** 'most.' The modal verbs in (7) are all modified by maximizers. In (7) b and (7) c., ***wànwàn***, a modifier with maximizing function that can only be used in negative sentences, is used.

(7)a.... hái méiyǒu chōngfèn lǐnghuì qiānmiàn-de dōngxì shí, jiù *jué* bù **yào**
yet without fully understand before thing when then absolutely not will

dòngshǒu gǎo yǐhoù-de shìqing (Huang & Liao 1988:358).
start do later thing

'Never start doing things before you fully understand them.'

b. dāyìng bíerén de shì, *wànwàn* bù **néng** shīxìn (Wang 1984:168).
promise others NOM thing absolutely not can break promise

'Once you have promised, you should never break your word.'

c. zhíxíng zhèngcè, *wànwàn* bù **kě** cūxīndàyì (Wang 1984:168).
implement policy absolutely not may negligent

'When implementing a policy, one should never be negligent.'

d. āgē ājiě mén chàng qǐ *zuì* **néng** dàibiǎo Dòngzú rénmín xīn shēng de
brother sister CL sing start most can represent Dongzu people heart sound ASSOC

gēqǔ (Zhi et al. 1999).
song

'The brothers and sisters started singing songs which can best express the aspirations of the Dong people.'

e. yǒu yì diǎn *zuì* **nénggòu** shuōmíng zhèi ge qūbié (Gao 2000).
there one CL most can illustrate this CL distinction

'There is one point which can best illustrate this distinction.'

The above examples demonstrate that Chinese modal verbs can certainly be modified by the two subcategories of amplifiers--boosters and maximizers, and the sentences here evidently do not support Li and Thompson's claim (ibid).

3.2 Emphasizers. This type of intensifying modifier has "a general heightening effect"(Quirk et al. 1973:439). Emphasizers in Chinese include ***shíjì*** 'actually,' ***dāngrán, yídìng/dìng, bìrán/bì*** 'certainly,' ***míngxiǎn/xiǎnrán*** 'clearly,' ***quèshí*** 'definitely,' ***xiǎnrán*** 'obviously,' ***zhēn*** 'really,' and ***zǒng*** 'always.' The data collected for this study show that there are plenty of cases in which the modal verbs are modified by emphasizers, as demonstrated in (8):

(8)a. wǒmén yídìng **yào** tǒngyī zǔguó (Huang & Liao 1988:358).
we certainly will unify motherland

'We will certainly unify our motherland.'

b. nǐ zhēn **yào** zǒu, wǒ sòng nǐ (Wang 1984:222).
you really will leave I see off you

'If you really must go, I'll see you off.'

c. biérén yǒu kùnnán, wǒmén *dāngrán* **y īnggāi** bāngzhù (Wang 1984:37).
other have difficulty we certainly should help

'When others have difficulty, we should certainly offer our help.'

d. gōngzuò zhōng *bìrán* **huì** pèngdào bùshǎo kùnnán (Wang 1984:11).
work in certainly will encounter not a few difficulty

'You will certainly encounter some difficulties in your work.'

e. jīntiān fēng dà, lúnchuán tíng háng, tā *dāngrán* bù **huì** lái le (Wang 1984:37).
today wind big ferry stop sail 3sg certainly not will come CRS[8]

'The wind is too strong today and the ferry stops running. He certainly will not come.'

f. yǒu nǐde bāngzhù, shìyàn *bì* **néng** chénggōng (Wang 1984:10).
have your help experiment definitely can succeed

'With your help, the experiment can definitely succeed.'

g. jìhuà dìng de qièhéshíjì, *dìng* **néng** shùnlì wánchéng(Wang 1984:45).
plan make CSC[9] practical certainly can smoothly complete

'The plan is practical and can certainly be accomplished smoothly.'

h. guòqù, yōngyǒu wúxiàn quánlì de huángdì men *zǒng* **yào** xúnzhǎo zhìgāo
past have limitless power NOM emperor CL always will search supreme

quánlì de wúxiàn yánxù(Zhang 1999).
power ASSOC limitless extension

'In the past, emperors who had boundless power would always search for the unlimited extension of that supreme power.'

i. zài yū jiānàdà huárén de jīēchù zhōng, wǒmén *zǒng* **néng** gǎnshòudào yì
with and Canada Chinese NOM contact in we always can feel one

fēn chénzhòng hé kūsè (Li 1999).
CL heaviness and bitterness

'During our meeting with the Canadian Chinese, we could always experience a heavy and bitter feeling.'

3.3 Downtoners. The third type of intensifiers consists of downtoners which "have a lowering effect" (Quirk et al. 1973:452). There are four subcategories of downtoners: compromisers which "have only a slight lowering effect," diminishers and minimizers which "scale downwards considerably," and approximators which "express an approximation to the force of the verb" (Quirk et al. 1973:452). Compromisers in Chinese include ***yǒuxiē*** 'kind of,' ***xiāngdāng*** 'quite,' ***pō/tǐng*** 'rather,' and ***huòduōhuòshǎo/ duōshǎo*** 'more or less.' Sentences in (9) show that modal verbs in Chinese can be modified by compromisers. In (9)a., ***dà***, a modifier indicating a lesser degree when used together with the negator ***bù*** (Xiàndài Hànyu Cídiǎn 1996), is used as a compromiser.

(9)a. nǐ hái *búdà* **huì** jiǎng pǔtōnghuà (Wang 1984:31).
you yet not quite know how speak mandarin

'You still don't quite know how to speak Mandarin.'

b. cānguān zhǎnlǎnhuì, *duōshǎo* **kěyǐ** xuédào yìdiǎn dōngxi (Wang 1984:51).
visit exhibition more or less be able to learn a little thing

'When you visit an exhibition, you can at least learn something new.'

The second subcategory of downtoners is minimizers. There are several minimizers in Chinese, such as ***gāng/jǐn/cái*** 'barely,' ***jīhūbú*** 'hardly,' ***jīhūméiyǒu*** 'scarcely.' Sentences in (10) illustrate the use of minimizers to modify Chinese modal verbs:

(10)a. chēzi tài xiǎo, *jǐn* **néng** zuò shí ge rén(Wang 1984:93).
car too small barely can sit ten CL people

'The car is too small and can barely take ten people.'

b. qīngzāo chūfā de shíhòu tiān hái hěn hēi, *gāng* **néng** kànchū qiánmiàn tóngzhì
morning set out NOM time sky still very dark hardly can see front comrade

de bēibāo (Xiàndài Hànyu Cídiǎn 1996:411).
GEN knapsack

'It was still very dark when we set off this morning. We could hardly see the knapsacks of the comrades in front.'

Diminishers are the third subcategory of downtoners which include ***yìxiē*** 'partly,' ***shǎoxū*** 'slightly,' ***yǒudiǎn*** 'a little,' and ***zài yídìng chéngdù shàng*** 'to some extent.' The fourth subcategory is approximators, such as ***chàdiǎn*** 'almost' and ***jīhū*** 'nearly,' implying "a denial of the truth-value of what is denoted by the verb" (Quirk et al. 1973:455). No examples of these two subcategories of downtoners are found for this study.

Table 1. Uses of Intensifying Modifiers for Chinese Modal Verbs[10]

Modal V.	Emphasizer	Amplifier		Downtoner			
		maximizer	booster	comprom.	diminisher	minimizer	approxim.
yīnggāi	X		X				
yīngdāng			X				
gāi			X				
néng	X	X	X			X	
nénggòu	X	X	X			X	
huì	X		X	X			
kěyi		X		X			
néng							
kěyi							
gǎn			X				
kěn							
děi							
bìxū							
bìyào							
bìděi							
huì	X		X				

The above examples have provided sufficient counter-evidence to Li and Thompson's (ibid) claim that Chinese modal verbs cannot be modified by intensifiers. Contrary to their claim, these examples have shown that intensifiers are frequently used to modify Chinese modal verbs. Table 1 summarizes the use of different types of intensifiers to modify Chinese modal verbs based on the data collected for this study. "X" in the table means that the use of this type of intensifiers to modify Chinese modal verbs is found from the written sources. A blank space means that no examples are found in this study.

4. Conclusions. The results from the analysis show, with compelling evidence, that four of seven types of Chinese modal verbs identified by Li and Thompson (ibid) can be modified by intensifying modifiers. While some of the modal verbs can be modified by only a certain type of intensifiers, a number of Chinese modal verbs can be modified by each of the three types of intensifiers. The table shows that Chinese modal verbs are more likely to be modified by emphasizers and amplifiers. Only some of the Chinese modal verbs can be modified by downtoners. If downtoners are used, compromizers and minimizers are more likely to be used than diminishers and approximators. On the basis of the data collected for this study, we can conclude that the property offered by Li and Thompson that Chinese modal verbs "cannot be modified by intensifiers" (ibid:173) is inaccurate, if not invalid, and that most of the Chinese modal verbs can certainly be modified by intensifiers, especially emphasizers and amplifiers.

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[2] Li and Thompson (1981, 1977) use the term "auxiliary verbs" instead of "modal verbs" in their discussion.

[3] Although some intensifiers can modify a modal verb in both an affirmative and a negative sentence interchangeably, as in (1), other intensifying modifiers are restricted to either an affirmative or a negative sentence, as shown in (2).

(1)a. biérén yǒu kùnnán, wǒmén *dāngrán* **y īnggāi** bāngzhù (Wang 1984:37).
other have difficulty we certainly should help

'When others have difficulty, we should certainly offer our help.'

b. jīntiān fēng dà, lúnchuán tíng háng, tā *dāngrán* bù **huì** lái le (Wang 1984:37).
today wind big ferry top sail 3sg certainly not will come CRS

'The wind is too strong today and the ferry stops running. He certainly will not come.'

(2)a. yǒu nǐde bāngzhù, shìyàn *bì* **néng** chénggōng (Wang 1984:10).
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promise others NOM thing absolutely not can break promise

'Once you have promised, you should never break your word.'

[4] Genitive (Li & Thompson 1997:113).

[5] Associative (ibid:113).

[6] Nominalizer (ibid:575).

[7] Classifier (ibid:104).

[8] Currently relevant state (ibid:238).

[9] Complex stative construction (ibid:623).

[10] All the Chinese modal verbs in the table are identified by Li and Thompson (ibid:182-183).